

## THE TUTOR AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE

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### ABSTRACT

*Quality and continuous improvement in Higher Education requires participation from tutors performing the role of change agents through action research designed to enhance the use of ICT in Higher Education. This tutor conducted an action research at Institut Perguruan Sarawak where ICT was infused into the pedagogy. This case study documents the use of a DVD entitled "Coach Carter" together with internet investigation to stimulate students to use ICT in innovative pedagogy. The theoretical perspective is Interpretivism and the research methodology is Phenomenology. Interpretivism is concerned with people constructing meaning. Phenomenology calls upon the researchers to break away from habitual patterns of thought that limit thinking. Data collection included the use of different formats of reflection sheets. Data analysis was done with a "Three Step Writing Method" moving from Protocol Writing, to Hermeneutic Writing and Phenomenology. The report on this action research was used as to teach students the process of research as a way to continuous improvement. It was also used to stimulate students to infuse ICT in innovative pedagogy. Collegial dialogue between this tutor and the Director of OUM Sarawak led to tutor – administrator collaboration in sharing good practices through the OUM Learning Management System. This case study indicates that tutors can be agents of change in using ICT in Higher education by conducting action research.*

### INTRODUCTION

"Coach Carter attempts to tell the story of a man who broke the mold to ensure that his players would do the same."

(Reflection from Hueh Koh Hong, Catherine Tang,  
Khei Kui Ling Wong Kee Cheng. 29/8/05.)

The reflection above is one of the gems that I gathered from an action research where I used a DVD on "Coach Carter", a thought provoking story of a basket ball coach who pushed his players not only to excel at the game but also at their studies and in life. As educators we endeavour to prepare our students for the game of life. To play well we need to demonstrate specific skills that will inculcate good team practices. As David Beckham spends hours practicing taking penalty shots, similarly, we educators hone our skills to make a breakthrough.

In this paper I will share my experiences in using my own action research exploring ways to use a DVD on "Coach Carter" to inspire students to be innovative and to guide students in writing proposals for School Based Research. The research design is qualitative and informed by constructivist epistemology.

### BACKGROUND

This case study began with the initial use of ICT to source for ideas, to the use of ICT to share resource materials and promote tutor - administrator collaboration to share good practices. As a lecturer in Institut Perguruan Sarawak (Sarawak Teacher Training Institute), I was concerned about inspiring teacher trainees to be innovative, to infuse technology in pedagogy and practice action research as a way to refine professional skills. I conducted an action research on how I used a DVD on "Coach Carter" to develop reflection on teacher professionalism. I wrote the report entitled "Using A DVD Of The Story Of Coach Carter To Develop Reflection Among Teacher Trainees". This became a vital resource for guiding students to write proposals for School Based Research.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This case study documents the path taken by a tutor to develop a resource that can provide a simple model for students embarking on School Based Research. Besides offering a concrete model of the process of research it also shows teachers that technological innovation in pedagogy can be as down to earth as using a popular DVD such as "Coach Carter". The sharing of ideas with Dr Frank Kiong, the Director of OUM Sarawak, created opportunities for providing the report as a resource material for other tutors in other sites through ICT.

My students used the report to get a clearer idea to do the following in School Based Research:

1. Write a research proposal using a qualitative approach.
2. Write a literature review categorizing different aspects of a topic.
3. Write an explanation on qualitative methodology
4. Develop structured reflection sheets to collect data
5. Identify emerging themes in analyzing data

## **THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

My concern was that students were intimidated at the idea of doing School Based Research. I decided to model the process of action research and write a report that would provide an example of the process and the product.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

My review of literature was directed at finding out more about the following:

1. Action Research
2. The Use Of Movies In The Classroom
3. Coach Carter

### **Action Research**

Action Research was pioneered by Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist. The action research cycle moves from data collection to evaluation to critical reflection and moves into another cycle. The cycles may be on going (Farlex, 2005) Kurt Lewin explored social psychological problems. He wanted to move beyond describing group life to investigating the conditions and forces which change or resist it (Greathouse, 1997).

Lewin believed that for change to occur the whole situation must be taken into account. If isolated factors are considered, an inaccurate scenario may emerge. This is known as the "field approach" (Greathouse 1997). I have tried to promote change in the field which is my classroom. Eventually this expanded into including a virtual classroom as the later cycles involved students, tutor and administrator exploring possibilities and collaborating through ICT.

### **The Use of Movies in the Classroom**

A website [www.geocities.com/sportsmovies/SPMD Use Tips.htm](http://www.geocities.com/sportsmovies/SPMD_Use_Tips.htm) offered guidelines for using sports movies in teaching a selection of themes. The theme index indicated that there was a huge resource in movies related to human potential. The themes included Anxiety, Career Issues, Mental Skills and Injury. The website also offered strategies for using the movies in the classroom. This was a useful guide not only for me but for my students. Introducing them to this website would encourage them to explore the net for ideas for infusing technology into pedagogy.

### **Coach Carter**

It was important for me to gather more information about Ken Carter to be able to draw in my students with real stories from his life. An internet search on Ken Carter revealed that he was man on a mission. He had written guidebooks for students, teachers and parents on how to get a grade to enter university. In one of his initiatives, he traveled across the country on a kick scooter to make people aware of the poor conditions of the education system.

“I was scooting for better education for all children”

(Ken carter, in [www.coachcarter.com](http://www.coachcarter.com),2005 )

He tried to create positive peer pressure by getting his players to tutor their team mates. In addition he wanted a change in perspective: he wanted to make the library a “cool place to be” (Carter, in [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com).2005)

## METHODOLOGY

The philosophical stance that lies behind the methodology in this study is interpretivism. Interpretivism is linked to of Max Webber who suggested that human science is concerned with understanding as opposed to natural science which is focused on causality (Crotty, 1997). The theoretical perspective in this study is informed by constructivist epistemology. This refers to a theory of knowledge generation that sees people participating in the collective generation of meaning.

This way of looking at the world and at the creation of knowledge challenged my consciousness to go beyond convention. With a spirit of exploration, I allowed myself to follow my intuitive ways of knowing as I interacted with my students and subsequently with Dr Frank Kiong, the Director of OUM Sarawak, with whom I collaborated to reach the larger network of tutors and students nation wide.

As I pondered on the role of educators in a Millennium where students grow up with digital entertainment, e - friendship networks and teaches them through internet exploration, I saw that we were at the cross-roads of consciousness. In transforming higher education we need to shift our view from what has been to what may be.

I use the term “methodology” to refer to the strategy behind the use of particular methods. The term “methods” will be used to refer to actual techniques and processes used to gather data and analyze data (Crotty, 1997).

This study has a qualitative design. The term “qualitative” is a methods level term, not a paradigm level term (Guba, 1990). The choice of the methods in this study is guided by a research paradigm that can be described as constructivist epistemology. A paradigm represents the underlying approach and fundamental principles on which the research is based (McKenzie, 1996).

## Methods

The method I used to collect and analyze data was a technique called “The Three Step Writing Method” (Vaz, 199). This method is shown in Table 1.

***Table 1 Three Step Writing Method***

The Three Step Writing Method	
1. Protocol Writing	Journal writing Reflection sheets E mails
2. Hermeneutic Writing	Identification of emerging themes Identification of prevailing understanding
3. Phenomenologize	Revisit the phenomenon Listen to the phenomenon

Protocol writing refers to my field notes and the reflections that I gathered from my students by using reflection sheets. After they had viewed the DVD “Coach Carter” I gave them an open reflection sheet to enable them to write freely in response to the movie. In the second cycle, I gave them a structured reflection sheet where I invited them to visit a website on Coach Carter. I hoped that they would enjoy the experience and consequently be motivated to use ICT in their own pedagogy. In the third cycle, I gave them another structured reflection sheet where I invited them to think of ways to be innovative in using ICT in pedagogy. The Protocol writing also includes the e mails I exchanged with Dr Frank Kiong as we discussed the possibility of collaborating to share resource materials from this study with

tutors and students through the OUM Learning Management System. The following extracts are taken from our virtual discussion:

"I believe this is a very good piece of work that can challenge the "traditional" role of a tutor as being someone who only does tutoring. With this research I believe we can pave the way for OUM tutors to look beyond the current job scope. I can see the possibility of uploading the findings into myLMS for everyone to share."

(Dr Frank Kiong, Director of OUM Sarawak, 29/6/06.)

"Interpretivism and Phenomenology empowers those who are willing to see that there is a prevailing understanding as well as a need to go beyond. In your position you can facilitate the infusion of tutor constructed resource materials to the larger network of learners and tutors. This will contribute to systemic change at a pace that is difficult to imagine possible without our OUM Learning Management System."

(Mary Anne Vaz, 29/6/06.)

In Hermeneutic Writing I interpret the protocol writing. I use brackets to identify prevailing understandings and emerging themes. I bracket my stream of consciousness so that I can separate what I am thinking about what has been written. For example, when I read the reflections on Coach Carter that had become more complex following my students exploration of the website I gave them I wrote this in brackets:

(I need to do more research in ways to get students to activate their thinking by exploring resources on the net.)

(Mary Anne Vaz. 29/8/05)

This bracketing technique is a modification of the bracketing technique used by Edmund Hurssel and Max Manen (van Manen, 1990) that used bracketing to suspend prevailing understanding derived from society and culture. I use brackets to mark off my internal dialogue.

When I phenomenologize, I revisit the phenomenon and listen to the phenomenon. I consciously distance myself from the original setting and original participants of the study. I pondered on the potential meanings in the situation. This brought me to a whole new cycle. I used the report I wrote on the action research on using the DVD on Coach Carter in another context. Initially, I used it to provide a model of a research report for students doing School Based Research. Subsequently, I used it as a model for students doing English for Written Communication as there was a component on writing a research proposal. I also used it to provide an example of action research when I taught Educational Psychology. It fitted well into the topic of restructuring schools with dynamic leadership. Many of my students were school principals and I offered them an example of how they could conduct a simple action research

I had become more and more aware that students doing School Based Research found the report useful as it provided them with a concrete path of how to proceed in writing their proposals for the research. The way I had structured the Action Research into three cycles made it easier for them to imagine how they could implement a pedagogy based research in the ten hours required in School Based Research.

Another stage of revisiting the phenomenon and listening to the phenomenon developed when I shared my aspirations with Dr Frank Kiong regarding reaching out to other tutors and other learners through the Learning Management System. He read through the report and my plans and gave me his support. It was a timely alliance of vision. I am very fortunate that the Director of Institut Perguruan Sarawak has supported my sharing of these findings at the SEAAIR Conference for another cycle is emerging for greater collaboration through networking.

### My Findings

To structure my findings I use a thinking tool called “Fruits for Collaborative Action Thinking” (Vaz, 1998) shown in Table 2

**Table 2** *Direction of Thinking Based on Fruits for Collaborative Action thinking*

Fruits Symbol	Direction Of Thinking
1. Durian	Challenges and possible gains
2. Rambutans	Things we enjoy which may have negative effects
3. Bananas	Strengths Of The team
4. Grapes	Learning from others
5. Figs	Sharing your own understanding (YOU)

Glesne & Peshkin (1992, p 179) describes Qualitative Inquiry as “An odyssey into our discipline, our practice and perhaps our souls.”

As a person who is artistic by nature I use a visual stimuli to focus my analysis as I revisit and listen to the phenomenon. When I think of a **Durian** I see that up loading the resources into the OUM Learning Management system may not be simple. How do we get tutors and students to read and use the materials? That’s the challenge. Yet, if we find a way, the gains are as delicious as what lies inside a thorny Durian.

When I think of Rambutans, I focus my thinking on current practices such as providing students with theory and expecting them to translate the theory into practice. They may not be able to do so. Too much theory without a bridging resource like a concrete research report may create mental blocks to learning. This is similar to getting a sore throat when we eat too many rambutans.

Picture **Bananas** and you see the power of team work. We have taken the first step to collaboration. It begins with collective vision making. **Grapes** enable me to see what I can learn from others. For example, the Tutor Connexions digital bulletin in the OUM LMS offers a path for sharing. The Subject Matter Expert (SME) forum in the OUM LMS is another avenue for sharing. How can we build up on these channels for sharing?

**Figs** call on you to share your own understanding. What is your interpretation of the possibilities? For Dr Frank Kiong, he saw this research paving the way for tutors to rethink their job scope beyond the traditional role of tutoring. My own understanding is that this research paper is a product that will be a resource for developing a writing style for phenomenology. What is your understanding of the possibilities? Phenomenology calls on us to interact. I have included my e mail to facilitate sharing of ideas.

Students writing their reports on their School Based Research may be encouraged to write from their hearts and allow themselves to create their own thinking tools. Phenomenology calls on us to move beyond habitual patterns of thought and to be authentic, to be YOU. It calls us to rediscover ourselves and revision.

### DISCUSSION

One concept in Phenomenology is “intentionality”. It refers to the idea that we are beings in the world. When we describe the world, we describe a part of ourselves. When we describe ourselves, we describe a part of the world. The assumptions of constructivism are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3 Assumptions in the Quantitative and Qualitative Paradigms**

Quantitative	Qualitative
Social facts have objective reality	Reality is socially constructed
Primacy of method	Primacy of subject
Generalizability	Contextualization
Prediction	Interpretation
Causal explanation	Understanding actors perspectives
Abstract language write up	Descriptive Language
Detachment	Involvement
Objective portrayal	Empathetic understanding

(Adapted from Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p 7)

### **Methodological Rigor**

In qualitative inquiry every human experience is viewed as unique. Rather than striving for scientific objectivity, the researcher is striving for artistic integrity. The artistic integrity is achieved by communicating the diversity of human experience in an engaging, even poetic manner (Sandelowski, 1996). In designing this study I have endeavoured to blend scientific rules and artistic imagination in order to be true to my way of knowing.

### **The Decision Trail**

Koch (1994) suggests that one approach in rigor is to leave a decision trail. Garman (1994) theargues that the most important consideration is the unique intent, the worthiness of the effort and the extent to which it is accomplished.

### **The Creation of Symbols and Personal Thought**

In contemplating the findings I took heed of the caution by Bogdon & Biklen (1982) that near sightedness plaques most research. Through the steps set out in the Three Step Writing Method I moved from a detailed examination of the protocol writing to contemplation of the phenomenon by revisiting the images and voices mentally.

In identifying themes that emerged I looked out for words and phrases that were unfamiliar and used in ways to which I was not accustomed. Bogdon & Bilken (1982) states that this special vocabulary may signify aspects of the setting those are important to explore. This supports the view of Crotty (1996a) that meanings are not encountered but created.

“They come into being as subject and object relate to each other. They spring from dialogue - mutual interaction- between subject and object.”

(Crotty, 1996a, p152)

In creating meaning through the system of symbols called Fruits for Collaborative Action Thinking” which I designed for my dissertation on inclusive education in 1998 I am being true to my way of knowing. Crotty (1996b, p 272) describes Mainstream Phenomenology as “necessarily a first person experience”. Phenomenology acknowledges that humans are creative (Ritzer, 1988).I concurs with this view and has presented the report in the first person. This is designed to express the qualities of the immediate experience of the consciousness of the researchers in reflecting on the phenomenon.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Dr Fank Kiong and I would like to recommend that these findings be shared through the OUM Learning Management System. It will offer a resource that can be used as a catalyst for discussion on how tutors can be agents of change. Gates (1999) points out that in the digital age connectivity takes a broader meaning than simply putting two or more people in touch. The internet creates a universal space for information sharing. When we forge links and share our experiences, ideas and achievements, we make progress towards our common goals. (MacMullin & Vaz, 1995). Gates (1999) cautions us to stay ahead of the learning curve in the information age. Our organization has a new nervous system that will instantly transfer new information to others through websites. With this change in boundaries we need to shift people into thinking work.

## CONCLUSION

We would like to thank the organizing committee of the SEAAIRE Conference 2006 for giving us this opportunity to meet. Organizations learn through individuals who learn. Tapping the potential of people requires a new understanding of the action of the heart, a sincere desire to serve the world (Sege, 1999). Action research bears fruit in the process of influencing others. Let us not keep our good practices within our own organizations but reach out and share with others. This exchange of good practices will take us to higher levels of professionalism.

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